



[Core Issues Shaping Voter Perceptions in the Lead-Up to the 2026 Midterm Elections](#)

As Americans get ready for the 2026 midterm elections, several notable issues stand out in early conversations about what will motivate turnout and influence choices at the ballot box. With less than nine months until Election Day, analysts are beginning to sketch out early forecasts for the balance of power in Congress, while polling data provides insight into which issues are driving voter intensity. Forecasts regarding control of the U.S. House and U.S. Senate suggest that both chambers are likely to be highly competitive. Historically, the party holding the White House faces structural headwinds in midterm elections. Since World War II, the president's party has lost House seats in all but a handful of midterms, with the average loss exceeding 20 seats. Republicans currently defend a narrow House majority, meaning even a small shift in competitive suburban districts could alter overall control. Several nonpartisan election analysts rate more than two dozen House races as toss-ups or leaning only slightly toward one party, underscoring how tight the races are expected to be.

The Senate map presents a different but equally delicate landscape. A limited number of truly competitive seats could determine majority control, particularly in purple and narrowly divided states. Early modeling suggests that if the national environment tilts even slightly toward Democrats, Senate control could shift by one or two seats. Conversely, if Republican turnout outpaces expectations in battleground states, the current alignment could hold or expand. At this stage, economic conditions and presidential approval ratings are widely viewed as the most significant variables influencing these projections.

Across multiple national surveys conducted this winter, between 35 and 45 percent of voters identify inflation or the cost of living as the single most important issue facing the country. When respondents are allowed to select multiple concerns, more than 70 percent list inflation as a major worry. By comparison, immigration typically registers in the mid 20 percent range as a top issue, while foreign policy crises often poll in the teens unless a specific escalation occurs. These numbers suggest that affordability remains the dominant lens through which voters are evaluating national leadership.

Across demographic groups, economic worries are dominating the early 2026 agenda for voters. Concerns about inflation and the rising cost of everyday life continue to be the most widely shared priority. Recent polling shows that many Americans place inflation and cost-of-

living stress at the very top of their issue list, with more respondents naming it their most important concern than any other topic. This includes not just prices at the grocery store or gas pump, but basic expenses like housing costs and utilities. Latino voters in particular place cost pressures high on their list of concerns, with survey data showing roughly six in ten identifying the issue of inflation as their primary economic concern.

When voters feel squeezed financially, it tends to bleed into their views of leadership and accountability. Performance on inflation and economic stability has become closely tied to how people evaluate those in power. In several recent surveys, a notable share of people express dissatisfaction with how the government is managing prices and the economy more broadly, with around half describing current economic conditions as “poor” and nearly as many saying they feel financially worse off than a year ago. Presidential approval numbers mirror these perceptions, hovering in the low to mid 40 percent range nationally, with economic approval ratings often even several points lower.

A large majority of adults also report worrying about being able to afford health care for themselves and their families, with surveys showing roughly three quarters expressing concern about unexpected medical bills. Around 45 percent say they have delayed or skipped some form of medical care in the past year due to cost. Polling finds that health care costs now rank above most other living expenses in terms of voter worry, even ahead of rent or mortgage payments in some measures. More than four in ten people say that the cost of health care will influence both whether they vote and who they support in the midterms. That influence cuts across party lines, though priorities differ. Republican voters tend to cite premium costs and regulatory burdens as their top concerns, while Democratic voters more frequently point to prescription drug pricing and coverage protections. Independents consistently rank health care affordability among their top three voting considerations.

For some voters, concerns about foreign policy-related topics involving countries like Iran and Venezuela, as well as the state of affairs in the Middle East influence their view of national leadership and global stability. Polling suggests that roughly one third of voters say foreign policy will be very important to their vote, though this number rises among older voters and veterans. Approval of the administration’s handling of foreign affairs tends to track closely with partisan identification, with these figures often slightly below overall job rating numbers. Many are also now pushing for greater openness around high-profile investigations and document releases, including the ongoing public interest in files associated with the case of deceased sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. While this issue ranks lower in overall salience, surveys show that more than 60 percent of voters believe the federal government is not being sufficiently transparent in its release process surrounding the Epstein files. Among independent voters, trust in federal institutions has fallen below 30 percent in some measures, suggesting that transparency debates could influence turnout and overall race outcomes – especially in elections that are anticipated to have particularly tight margins.

Current polling and historical patterns suggest that we will see yet another competitive midterm election season this year. If inflation perceptions improve and approval ratings rise,

the president's party could mitigate typical midterm losses. However, if they do not, many anticipate significant Democratic gains in both houses of Congress come November. That said, even small swings in suburban districts and battleground states could produce measurable shifts in the Congressional balance of power. With affordability, health care, foreign policy, and institutional trust all in play, the months ahead will be critical in determining whether 2026 follows historical precedent or defies it.